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FM AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9200
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1878
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 1906
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1932
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 1894
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1923
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 1859
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1387
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 0710

UNCLAS DUSHANBE 002186

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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STATE FOR SCA/CEN, DRL

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [KIRF](#) [KPAO](#) [EAID](#) [TI](#)

SUBJECT: COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS IMAM RETURNS FROM U.S. TO PREACH
DEMOCRACY

¶1. (U) Badriddin Karimov, a local Tajik imam who participated in the USAID-sponsored Community Connections Program, "Religion in a Secular Society," returned to Tajikistan inspired by the pluralism and tolerance he observed in the United States. On the 20-day program to the United States, Karimov met with congressmen, religious leaders of various faiths and community members. Participants learned how religion and the state interact and examined mechanisms that serve to protect religious rights in the United States. Upon returning to Tajikistan, Karimov began preaching sermons at his local mosque on the role of democracy in Islam. He spoke to PolOff November 30 about his plans to reach out to imams in rural areas and to spread the word about pluralism and tolerance in the U.S. and how democracy and Islam can go hand-in-hand.

¶2. (SBU) Karimov is the imam-khatib of a local mosque on the outskirts of Dushanbe. Still young, he became an imam when a friend invited him to preach at the mosque. The mosque's previous imam had been fired due to alleged corruption and schemes to lure money away from worshippers. Karimov told PolOff that he was shocked by the number of Tajiks who have been misinformed by poorly-educated religious men who claim to be imams.

¶3. (SBU) Many imams in Tajikistan receive little formal training and Karimov is not the first person to claim that Tajiks have been taught false ideology. The government also uses this as a pretext to test imams on their knowledge of Islam. Even the chairman of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan has noted that religious leaders and the people of Tajikistan are not well-informed on the teachings of the Koran.

¶4. (U) Because of the absence of high quality formal religious education institutions in Tajikistan, a number of Tajiks travel to Saudi Arabia, Pakistan or other countries to seek religious education. Karimov remarked that many Tajiks do not take these scholars who return from abroad seriously. The returnees often preach a version of Islam unfamiliar to Tajiks who are Muslims in a secular nation that was under an atheist Soviet thumb for the better part of a century. Sometimes the returnees even try to teach Shia Islam, although most Tajiks consider themselves Sunnis.

15. (SBU) After his Community Connections exchange, Karimov believes the government is observing his activities carefully. He produces a radio show on Islam in Tajikistan that used to broadcast domestically until the government ordered the station to stop. ((This happened before he left on the program.)) The show is now only permitted to air on international stations, which reach Persian language audiences in Afghanistan. This has not deterred Karimov from pursuing plans to spread his message to others. He plans on traveling and delivering sermons in rural mosques throughout Tajikistan.

16. (U) COMMENT: Karimov and his mission present yet another good example of how exchanges provide public diplomacy pay-offs far greater than the cost of a trip. Post regularly engages Tajik and Muslim leaders on issues like Islam, pluralism and democracy but having an exchange alumni come back sufficiently inspired to create his own speaking tour means our programs are working. Through this single Community Connections Program, the U.S. government has given voice to a potentially important advocate of the virtues of religious tolerance and pluralism in a secular society who is able to reach a wide audience of Tajiks. END COMMENT.

JACOBSON